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Remarks by
James E. Webb, Administrator
National Aeronautics and Space Administration
upon presentation of
The Freedom 7 Capsule
to the
Smithsonian Institution
October 23, 1961

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Dr. Carmichael, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is a great privilege on behalf of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration to present to the Smithsonian Institution the Freedom 7 spacecraft.

Three years ago, on October 1, 1958, Project Mercury was organized. Six days later, the Space Task Group was established under Mr. Gilruth who is here today and who has served as its distinguished leader.

Three months later, the McDonnell Aircraft Corporation was selected to build the spacecraft, and two years later delivered the first prototype.

In March 1960, the first production spacecraft was delivered.

On May 5, 1961, the famous flight of Alan Shepard in the Freedom 7 was launched at the Atlantic Missile Range.

The Mercury capsule, in which Shepard made his flight, was recovered 15 minutes and 20 seconds later, 302 miles down range.

No project of this magnitude and complexity has ever been completed by our country in so short a time.

Power for the launch was provided by a modified Redstone rocket, 83 feet high, weighing 66,000 pounds, and developed by Dr. Wernher von Braun's team at the Marshall Space Flight Center. This rocket was built by the Chrysler Corporation.

The name, Freedom 7, was chosen by Alan Shepard for the Mercury capsule when he knew he would fly the first suborbital mission. It happens that in the Mercury program this is Spacecraft No. 7; the Redstone booster was No. 7; and of course, you all know seven of our nation's most experienced and able test pilots volunteered as astronauts for the Mercury program. All seven qualified and were eager to make this flight, as indeed, they are eager to make any future Mercury flights.

If to Alan Shepard the symbol "7" seemed appropriate, the word "Freedom" was also a happy choice. The full release and full play of the total power and capacity of the human being for high accomplishment is basic to the system of economic, social, and political organization which produced Project Mercury and Freedom 7. This system was able to marshall in the Space Task Group hundreds of able men and women. It permitted them to draw on the scientific, technical, and developmental resources of some 18,000 other men and women in the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and the worldwide facilities of a tracking and data acquisition network. It gave them the tremendous resources of the U.S. Air Force at the Atlantic Missile Range, the great capabilities of the U.S. Navy in its monitoring and retrieval responsibilities, and the backup of the many, many American companies who took part in this project.

At McDonnell Aircraft, nine hundred engineers and technicians were involved. Eleven major contractors were responsible for major parts, ranging from the escape rocket to the environmental control system.

The program also owes a debt of gratitude to the pioneering work and continuing efforts of Dr. Hugh Dryden and Dr. Abe Silverstein and to the organization that Dr. Keith Glennan instituted.

The reliable Redstone rocket was our first ballistic booster and has the distinction not only of powering the first Mercury manned suborbital flight, but also the first United States satellite, Explorer I.

In the old days, it was considered a good rule to have the engineer who designed a new airplane or made changes in it, to fly with the test pilot -- on the theory that the one who designed the machine should himself be ready to fly in it. From the size of the Mercury spacecraft you can see that this was not possible for Dr. von Braun, but I am sure both he and Mr. Gilruth were there in spirit.

Many scientists who, a year ago, were uncertain as to the role of man in the space environment are now developing strong views that the use of man to supplement machines and instruments in the exploration of space is essential. This stems from the fact that man can take with him his ability to observe the hitherto unknown, and form judgments, which instruments simply cannot accomplish.

The Mercury program is our first step in manned space flight. It will test the combined capacity of man and machine and will give us our first experience with extended weightlessness.

Balloonists have known for more than two centuries that something significant happens when man "breaks contact with the earth." In the lower ranges of balloon flight, men feel still attached to the earth, but as they proceed higher and the earth recedes and is left behind, there is the feeling of leaving normal surroundings and a definite break with the normal feeling of security. One important aspect beyond this is the psychology of man or men confined in space vehicles far from earth.

To Americans seeking answers, proof that man can survive in the hostile realm of space is not enough. A solid and meaningful foundation for public support and the basis for our Apollo man-in-space effort is that U.S. astronauts

are going into space to do useful work in the cause of all their fellow men.

Such flights as those of Freedom 7 are not stunts. They are not antithetical to sober scientific and technological research. Interpreted properly, these dramatic events can add much to public understanding and excite creative interest in extending the base of knowledge on which public support must rest.

And this brings us to this presentation and this occasion: If, as has been said, "National recollection is the foundation of national character," the millions of Americans who come to the Smithsonian to see the instruments used to make real in action the hopes and dreams of our greatest men and women will find here, from this spacecraft Freedom 7 and a recollection of Alan Shepard's flight in it, an inspiration for character formation of the highest order.

So I am happy to present this spacecraft Freedom 7 to you, Dr. Carmichael, for the Smithsonian Institution.

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